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## The First World War

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developed neither an effective mechanism for material procurement nor a tightly run, well coordinated doctrine-development process.

Had the Army fought World War II based on *FSR* 1939, it surely would have squandered American lives. To the credit of officers like Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, Army Ground Forces commander Lesley McNair, and a small group of innovative thinkers, the War Department took immense strides toward the development of a viable fighting force based on their observation of German military successes in Poland and France. The resulting *FSR*, published in 1941, took into consideration operational accounts of European battles and American large-scale maneuvers. Though not perfect, *FSR* 1941 significantly increased the emphasis on air and armored operations.

Odom's analysis mirrors the history of the U.S. Army during the interwar period and offers a chilling reminder that today's Army must overcome challenges similar to those it faced in the decades of the 1920s and 1930s. To remain a viable force for the twenty-first century, Odom advises, the Army must avoid the mistakes of the past and procure enough equipment for experimentation, as well as develop a system that collects, analyzes, and disseminates foreign intelligence. Most

importantly, however, the Army must establish an organization dedicated to monitoring and accommodating change.

In the final analysis, Odom has produced a superb analysis for current planners. Using military history as a forum to promote modernization, Odom offers the Army two choices: pay in cash today to remain on the cutting edge of military development, or pay in blood later, on a yet-unknown field of battle.

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Keegan, John. *The First World War*. New York: Knopf, 1999. 475pp. \$35

"The First World War was a tragic and unnecessary conflict." With those sad words, John Keegan opens his history of that war to end all wars, from which came such grief. Much has been written on the origins, conduct, and consequences of the First World War, some of it quite splendid. Keegan's *The First World War* is a distinguished addition to the genre.

John Keegan was for many years a senior lecturer in military history at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, and later a visiting fellow at Princeton University. Starting with his now classic *The Face of Battle* (1977), Keegan has

written seventeen well received books on the history of warfare in Europe, North America, and at sea. He is among the most prominent and widely read military historians of the late twentieth century.

This book begins in 1914 with a prosperous Europe, in which contemporary scholars had asserted that a major war would be irrational and thus quite impossible. In July, a Serbian gunman in Sarajevo (then under the rule of Austria) blew that comforting notion into the dustbin of history. Keegan gives vivid descriptions of the entangling military alliances, inflexible deployment plans, and surging nationalism that swept Europe into what was expected to be a short but glorious war of maneuver.

Yet by the end of the year, the Schlieffen Plan had stalled in France, and the Germans had been stopped at the battles of First Ypres and the Marne. The western front had stagnated in trenches from Switzerland to the English Channel, and the Russians had been mauled and defeated at Tannenberg. The western front sank into the mud, blood, and static trench warfare that took the young lives of a whole generation of men from several countries,

Keegan opens new insights for the modern reader with his analysis of the firepower and command limitations of trench warfare, along

with his inclusion of the little-remembered campaigns beyond the western and eastern fronts.

1915 was the year of maneuver and action in distant theaters, campaigns whose objectives, albeit not achieved, were to end-run the impasses of late 1914. Aiming to control access to India and to oil, British, Turkish, and German forces maneuvered in Palestine, the Tigris Valley, and as far as Baku on the Caspian. Italians and Austrians struggled over the mountains separating them. At Gallipoli, British, Australian, and New Zealand forces landed to seize the Turkish forts that controlled the Dardanelles, to ease the pressure on the Russians. After eight months of fighting on the beaches, the allies withdrew.

Great battles defined 1916. In an effort to break the stalemates, huge frontal assaults were fought at Verdun and the Somme. They failed. Keegan's analysis of their failure is perceptive. The military technology of the day gave armies massive killing capacity but no capability for mass coordination. Tactical communications were slow and routinely failed in battle. Thus artillery fire and infantry advance could not be synchronized, and the synergy of combined arms was lost. The battles were doomed when they started; men were lost by the hundreds of thousands.

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Keegan also discusses the eastern front of 1916, with its great battles and massive casualties. In places still obscure to today's reader, hundreds of thousands were lost for modest gains: a million dead for the gain of sixty miles at most in the Russian offensives between the Pripet Marshes and the Carpathian Mountains during the summer of 1916.

In Keegan's words, 1917 became the year of "the breaking of armies." Troops on all fronts were strained to their limits, and inevitably some broke. After the battle of Arras in April, the French army faced widespread "indiscipline"; the men simply refused to go on the offensive. The Germans, who were also at the limits of their manpower, seemed to accept this, and both sides settled down to a relatively low level of violence. That autumn, however, the Italians collapsed at Caporetto and were driven back nearly to Venice by the Austrians.

On the eastern front, the Russian Revolution spread to its frontline troops, who lost heart for offensives against the Germans. The new Russian offensive of the spring of 1917 failed, and the Bolsheviks opened discussions with the Central Powers at Brest-Litovsk. The Russian army disappeared; in Lenin's memorable words, its soldiers "voted for peace with their feet."

Fifty German infantry divisions were released and came to the western front in 1918. With new tactics for maneuver and deep penetration by fast, light forces, the Germans made worrisome initial advances but soon ran out of steam. By the summer of 1918, the weight of fresh, aggressive American forces was felt, and by November it was all over save for the making of a peace—a peacemaking that might be said to have been as ruinous as the war.

It would be misleading to treat the First World War as a purely military event. Keegan's final chapter links the extensive disruptions of the war to the central themes of conflict in the later twentieth century. In the East, the Russians turned to civil war and the Bolshevik regime. The Hohenzollern dynasty vanished with the kaiser's abdication, and turmoil ruled Germany. The groundwork for fascism was laid. The fragile Austro-Hungarian Empire disintegrated into minor and unstable states, some of which are again making mischief in the twenty-first century.

Keegan's lesson, and he makes it well, is that wars do not go according to plan. Those planning short, decisive wars would do well to remember that when Kaiser Wilhelm II declared war on France and Russia he did not anticipate the ten million deaths that would follow.

The First World War was a huge and complex event. Keegan's talent lies in setting it in order, laying out the great themes, tucking in the outlying events, and serving a rich menu of detail at the right points—the life of soldiers in the trenches, the nobility of King Albert, the numbers of generals killed in battle, and the air and naval wars, to mention a few.

This is a very good book about a very bad war.

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Strobridge, Truman R., and Dennis L. Noble. *Alaska and the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service 1867–1915*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1999. 223pp. \$34.95

Heretofore, little has been written about the activity of the United States in governing the new Alaska territory soon after its acquisition. Furthermore, there is scant material on the governmental thread that kept this vast territory bound together and intact through the second half of the eighteen hundreds. Archives hold much of this history, and that is where the two authors of this book went to compile their intriguing tale of a little-known service executing an enormous responsibility, most often as the sole representative of any branch of the U.S. government.

The U.S. Revenue Cutter Service (USRCS) arrived in the Bering Sea soon after the purchase of Alaska in 1867. For the next forty-eight years, until the service was incorporated into the U.S. Coast Guard in 1915, this small group of men in wooden ships (sail and steam powered) became the foundation for the Alaskan government. This unique maritime agency established the sovereignty that ultimately produced the state that exists today.

The cuttermen explored vast unknown areas in their multimission role. They provided humanitarian relief following natural disasters, brought medical care to isolated areas, fed starving North American natives, rescued shipwrecked sailors, protected wildlife, charted territories that led to discovering isolated tribes in the wilderness, and brought law to hostile surroundings. By their presence these small crews created a veneer of civilization in the rough frontier and the isolated settlements. So sensible were some of their actions that many of their solutions to problems became the laws of the new state a hundred years later.

Maritime historians Truman Strobridge and Dennis Noble chronicle events from widely scattered records in the service's colorful history. Their story, filled with episodes of high drama as well as events of historical significance,